

MAL BERISHA
APPRECIATION TO DR. MEHMET ÖZ
(MY PERSONAL STORY)



*With deep respect and sincere gratitude, I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to **Dr. Mehmet Oz** – a distinguished physician, humanitarian, and global figure of Turkish American heritage – for his unwavering dedication to the values of human dignity, science, and cross-cultural understanding.*

MY PERSONAL STORY WITH DR. MEHMET ÖZ, WHO SAVED MY LIFE

In early November 2001, while working for the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), I was suddenly confronted with a hidden illness that I had unknowingly carried since childhood.

By a stroke of fate, I discovered this illness entirely by chance, and it was diagnosed by the hands of the renowned Kosovar cardiologist, Dr. Gani Bajraktari.

He delivered the shocking news that I was suffering from an aneurysm in my heart, which could result in sudden death at any moment—even in his own hands. In fact, even if I were about to enter the operating room, a ruptured aorta would make survival impossible.

His urgent advice was to seek immediate treatment at a specialized clinic and to undergo heart surgery without delay.

His second piece of advice was to avoid traveling by airplane, as the change in air pressure could cause instant death.

However, being "stubborn" by nature, I did not follow the advice of my friend, Dr. Bajraktari, and decided to travel immediately to Istanbul for a second opinion.

At the first clinic I visited, I received even more unsettling news. Dr. Levent confirmed the same diagnosis that Dr. Gani had given me, but added that according to Turkish medical protocol, patients in such a condition must not be allowed to leave the clinic.

Furthermore, if a patient refuses treatment, they may be detained by force to ensure their life is saved.

“Do not fly by plane!” This was an ultimatum.

That night, I met with my dear friends: Mr. Hilmi Manço—son of Ahmet Bey Arnauti—and his wife, the well-known journalist for the *Turkish Daily News*, Yasemin Dobra Manço.

When I shared my situation with them, they were alarmed beyond imagination. They immediately sprang into action to find the best and nearest hospital where I could be admitted. However, when they realized that I would not agree to undergo surgery in Istanbul, they called Turkey’s most prominent chief cardiac surgeon and asked:

“Which hospital in New York should our friend go to in order to be in the safest hands for such a heart surgery?”

The professor’s response was: **“Columbia University Medical Center, Presbyterian Hospital, in the hands of Dr. Mehmet Öz.”**

The next day, after a 12-hour flight, I landed at JFK Airport. I explained the reason for my trip to my sons and asked them to take me directly to that hospital.

Two days later, I found myself at Dr. Mehmet Öz’s clinic at Columbia University’s Heart Hospital.

His secretary, Emine Hanım—a kind Turkish American woman—had already been informed of my condition from Istanbul. She immediately told me that my name had reached Dr. Mehmet Öz’s office before I had, and that he would personally oversee the surgery, which would be performed by Professors Marc Warshawsky and Neloo M. Edwards.

After the open-heart surgery—or as they call it, “heart-on-the-table” surgery—which lasted, I don’t know how many hours, I woke up to

the ticking sound of a platinum valve in my chest, a sound that has continued without pause since November 13, 2001.

When I “woke up,” the first person I saw in front of me, gently holding my face, was none other than Dr. Mehmet Öz.

He comforted me, spoke to me in Turkish and English, and assured me that everything had gone perfectly.

In 2022, his name appeared on American television screens as a candidate for the U.S. Senate, running in the state of Pennsylvania. At the time, I wrote an article urging Albanian Americans to vote for Dr. Öz for many reasons—not least because he had saved my life.

Naturally, everyone holds their own political convictions, but we, as Albanians, cannot overlook such a prominent figure of global humanitarianism.

Dr. Öz did not win that election. It was deeply disappointing to see his opponent secure the seat. But life goes on. And now, the doctor who saved my life has been selected by the upcoming President of the United States, Donald Trump, as a member of his cabinet.

This great man will now be responsible for the well-being of 160 million Americans.

The world isn’t as vast as we might think.

Congratulations, dear Dr. Mehmet Öz.

For your reference, please visit my article from that time on my website at:

MEHMET ÖZ, THE DOCTOR WHO SAVED MY LIFE 23 YEARS AGO,
APPOINTED AS A MEMBER OF PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP'S
CABINET - Mal Berisha